

**TOOL HOLDER WITH GUIDE PLATE
FOR MOUNTING TOOLS HAVING SPRING CLIPS**

Cross-Reference to Related Application

This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional
5 Application Serial No. 60/435,435, filed on December 20,
2002, which is incorporated herein by reference.

Technical Field

The present invention relates generally to tool
holders for holding tools having spring clips, such as tape
10 measures. More specifically, exemplary embodiments of the
invention include tool holders having rigid guiding plates,
which enable an individual to slideably engage and
disengage tools (e.g., a tape measure with a spring clip)
on the holder with overwhelming ease.

15 **Background**

Carpenters and other tradesmen typically carry various
tools and accessories that they frequently use when
performing a particular project. Various devices and
methods have been developed for carrying tools, wherein the
20 tools are attached to a person's belt or otherwise attached
on and around the waistband of the person. With any tool
holder design, it is desirable that the tool holder enables
a person to readily access the tool from the holder, as
well as place the tool in/on the tool holder, without undue

burden or difficulty. This is especially desirable for tools that are used on a frequent basis, such as tape measures that are used by tradesmen (e.g., carpenters) for measuring anything from cut lumber to tile, etc.

5 One conventional technique for carrying tools such as tape measures, chalk lines, etc., is to attach a spring clip to the tool casing so that the tool can be clipped to either a person's belt (or other garment part such as pocket) or to a tool holder device. By way of example,
10 Figs. 1a and 1b are diagrams illustrating a conventional tape measure (10) having a spring clip device (30). Fig. 1a is a perspective front view of a tape measure (10) and Fig. 1b is a perspective side view of the tape measure (10). Those of ordinary skill in the art understand the
15 different components and operation of such tape measures.

 In general, the exemplary tape measure (10) comprises an outer casing (20) and a contoured, retaining spring clip (30) mounted on a side portion of the tape measure casing (20). The spring clip (30) is typically made of metal and
20 shaped to provide spring-like tension. More specifically, the spring clip (30) comprises a resiliently deflectable tongue portion (31) having an end portion (32). The tongue portion (31) is bent under tension to rest against the casing (20) and is moveable in direction of arrow (as shown

in Fig. 1a) to permit insertion of some fixed element (belt, etc.) for attachment purposes. As shown in Fig. 1b, the tongue portion (31) comprises a slotted portion (33) to permit removal of a fastener (screw) (34) to allow the
5 spring clip (30) to be removed from the casing (20) if desired.

It has been proven to be difficult and inefficient to use spring clips to attach tools to a person's belt. For instance, with the tape measure (10) described above, a
10 person has to unclip and then clip the tape measure to his/her belt each time the tape measure is used. In fact, the person may have to use both hands to clip the tape measure on his/her belt, pocket or other clothing part, especially when the person's belt is worn tight. This can
15 be extremely burdensome, especially when the person is working on a ladder and needs to use one hand to hold the ladder. If the person's belt is worn loose, the tape measure may accidentally unclip from the belt. Also, the frequent use of the spring clip (30) tends to cause
20 excessive wear to the belt or pocket, or other garment part to which the tape measure is attached.

Another conventional method for holding a tape measure having a spring clip is to clip the tape measure on a clipping device that is attached to a tool pouch. For

instance, U.S. Patent Application Publication No. US
2002/001457, dated February 7, 2002, by Snider, et al,
discloses a tape measure holder that is affixed to outer
front pockets of a work belt storage pouch, wherein the
5 holder essentially comprises a clipping portion to which
the spring clip of a tape measure is attached. One problem
with this tape measure holder design is that the clipping
portion is typically not readily accessible and the user
must look at the clipping portion to align the spring clip
10 with the clipping portion to attach the tape measure. This
can be extremely burdensome, especially when the tape
measure is frequently used, or when the person is working
on a ladder, or when the person is holding materials or
tools with his/her other hand.

15 Another tape measure holder design is disclosed in
U.S. Patent No. 4,757,927, entitled "*Holder for Suspending
Rule Clip or the Like*". This patent discloses a
rectangular holder for suspending a tape measure, wherein
the spring clip of a tape measure is clipped to a laterally
20 extending slot that is disposed adjacent a lower edge the
rectangular tool holder. Although this design provides
improvements over conventional tape measure holders, it
does not provide the advantages of the present invention as
described below.

Other tool holders designs include pouches, pockets, compartments, etc, for holding tools such as tape measures. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,100,037 discloses a leather tape measure holder comprising a leather pouch stowage of a
5 tape measure. The holder comprises a strap member with a snap fastener for securing the tape measure in the pouch. These designs are problematic in that it has been proven to be difficult and burdensome to continuously access and store the tools while working.

10 Accordingly, more efficient and easier methods for mounting tools such as tape measures are highly desired.

Summary of the Invention

In general, exemplary embodiments of the invention include tool holders that are designed to hold tools having
15 spring clip mechanisms. More specifically, in one exemplary embodiment of the invention, a tool holder device comprises a guiding portion and a mounting portion. The mounting portion is adapted to engage a spring clip of a tool for mounting the tool. The guiding portion is adapted
20 to guide the spring clip towards the mounting portion as a person slides the tool from the guide portion to the mounting portion while maintaining contact between the spring clip and the guiding portion.

In another exemplary embodiment of the invention, a tool holder device comprises a planar guide plate having tapered edges, wherein a sidewall extends in a direction along each tapered edge, and wherein the sidewalls extend substantially perpendicular from a surface of the planar guide plate. The tool holder further comprises a mounting portion for insertably receiving a spring clip mounted on a tool, wherein the mounting portion is connected to the guide plate at an end portion thereof where the tapered edges converge.

These and other exemplary embodiments, aspects, features and advantages of the present invention will be described or become apparent from the following detailed description of exemplary embodiments, which is to be read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figs. 1a and 1b are schematic diagrams illustrating front and side views, respectively, of a conventional tape measure device having a spring clip mechanism.

Fig. 2 schematically depicts a front perspective view of a tool holder according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention.

Figs. 3 and 4 schematically depict isometric views of the exemplary tool holder of Fig. 2.

Fig. 5 schematically depicts a side view of the exemplary tool holder of Fig. 2 having a tape measure mounted thereon.

Fig. 6 schematically depicts an isometric view of the exemplary tool holder of Fig. 2 as mounted on a belt and having a tape measure mounted thereon.

Detailed Description of Exemplary Embodiments

In general, exemplary embodiments of the invention include tool holders that are designed to hold tools having spring clip mechanisms (or similar mechanisms). In particular, exemplary embodiments of the invention include tool holders comprising a guiding plate and mounting plate, wherein the guiding plate enables tools having a spring clip mechanism to be slideably engaged and disengaged from the mounting plate with ease. For illustrative purposes, exemplary embodiments as depicted in Figs. 2-6 will be described with regard to a tape measure with a spring clip mechanism (such as depicted in Figs. 1a and 1b). It is to be understood, however, that the exemplary embodiments described herein are not limited to tape measure holders and that based on the teachings herein, one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that tool holders according to the invention can be used, or otherwise

readily adapted for use, with other tools having spring clip mechanisms (or similar mechanisms).

Figs. 2, 3 and 4 schematically illustrate a tool holder according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention. In particular, Fig. 2 schematically depicts a front perspective view of a tool holder (40) according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention and Figs. 3 and 4 schematically depict isometric views of the exemplary tool holder (40). In general, the exemplary tool holder (40) comprises a planar guide plate (41), sidewalls (42) (or "guiding walls") that extend from a front surface of the guide plate (41), a mounting portion (43), and an attachment device (44) (e.g., spring clip) which is disposed on a back surface of the guide plate (41) (as shown in phantom lines in Figs. 2 and 3). As explained in further detail below, the guide plate (41) and the sidewalls (42) comprise a guiding portion of the tool holder (40), which enables a tool with a spring clip to be slideably guided to the mounting portion (43) to engage the spring clip of the tool with the mounting portion (43) with relative ease.

In one exemplary embodiment of the invention, as readily depicted in Fig. 4, the planar guide plate (41) is defined, in part, by tapered (upper) side edges (41a),

substantially parallel (lower) side edges (41b), and a curved (bottom) edge (41c). The curved bottom edge (41c) is depicted in Figs. 2 and 3 in phantom lines. The sidewalls (42) extend along the tapered side edges (41a) of the planar guide plate (41) and extend at an angle of about 90 degrees from the front surface of the planar guide plate (41). The sidewalls (42) converge toward the mounting portion (43) of the tool holder (40).

In general, the mounting portion (43) is designed to, e.g., insertably receive a spring clip of a tool and securely mount the tool on the tool holder (40). The mounting portion (43) comprises a mounting plate (43a), side plates (43b), and a bottom plate (43c) (or "lip portion"). The side plates (43b) extend along the (lower) side edges (41b) of the guide plate (41) and extend at an angle of about 90 degrees from the front surface of the guide plate (41).

The mounting plate (43a) is connected to (or integrally formed with) the side plates (43b) such that the planes defined by the mounting plate (43a) and guide plate (41) are substantially parallel and such that the inner surface of the mounting plate (43a) is offset a certain distance (as explained below) from the front surface of the

guide plate (41) to accommodate a spring clip of a tool and securely mount the tool.

The bottom plate (43c) operates to offset the spring clip at a certain distance from the outer casing of a tool
5 (when mounted on the tool holder (40)) to thereby generate a spring tension that is sufficient to allow the tool to be securely mounted on the tool holder (40). Further, the tool holder (40) comprises an aperture (45), which (as readily depicted in Fig. 4) is defined, in part, by the curved edge
10 (41c) of the guide plate (41) and an edge (43d) of the bottom plate (43c) of the mounting portion (43). As explained below, the aperture (45) provides an opening that allows a spring clip to protrude from the tool holder (40) as a tool is mounted. The aperture (45) can be optimally
15 sized and shaped to enable a tool to be readily mounted and removed from the tool holder (40).

An exemplary method of using the tool holder (40) for mounting a tape measure (such as depicted in Figs. 1a and 1b) will now be discussed in detail with further reference
20 to the exemplary embodiments depicted in Figs. 5 and 6. In particular, Fig. 5 schematically depicts a side view of the exemplary tool holder (40) having a tape measure (10) mounted thereon and Fig. 6 schematically depicts an isometric view of the exemplary tool holder (40) attached

to a person's belt and having a tape measure mounted thereon. As noted above, the guide plate (41) and the sidewalls (42) comprise a guiding portion that enables a person to slideably guide the tape measure (10) toward the mounting portion (43) to engage the spring clip (30) with the mounting portion (43).

More specifically, by way of example, to mount the tape measure (10) on the tool holder (40), initially, the person would bring the spring clip (30) of the tape measure (10) in contact with the front surface (S) of the guide plate (41) at some location above the mounting portion (43). Then, the person would slide the tape measure (10) down towards the mounting portion (43) while providing sufficient force to maintain contact between the spring clip (30) (in particular, the end portion (32) of the tongue portion (31)) and the surface (S) of the guide plate (41). As the user slides the tape measure (10) towards the mounting portion (43), if a side edge of the spring clip (30) contacts one of the sidewalls (42), the sidewall (42) will, in effect, "guide" the tape measure (10) towards the mounting portion (43) as the person continues to slide the tape measure down, thereby preventing the tape measure (10) from sliding off a side edge (41a) of the guide plate (41).

When the end portion (32) of the spring clip (30) reaches the mounting portion (43), the person will continue to slide the tape measure (10) down such that the tongue portion (31) of the spring clip (30) slides between the guide plate (41) and the mounting plate (43a). As the spring clip (30) continues to slideably engage the mounting portion (43), the tongue portion (31) will start to deflect away from its point of contact with the casing (20) due to the mounting plate (43a) being inserted between the tongue (31) and casing (20). Due to the aperture (45), this initial deflection, which is essentially equal to the thickness of the mounting plate (43a), will not impede the engagement process because the aperture (45) allows the end portion (32) to protrude past a plane defined by the back surface of the guide plate (41).

The tape measure (10) reaches a final mounting position (see Figs. 5 and 6), when the upper edge of the mounting plate (43a) makes contact to the upper round portion of the tongue (31). In the final mounting position, the bottom plate (43c) deflects the tongue portion (31) at a distance away from the casing (20) which provides sufficient spring tension to maintain the tape measure securely engaged on the mounting portion (43). Indeed, as depicted in Fig. 5, due to the deflection of the

spring clip (30) caused by the bottom plate (43c), the casing (20) of the tape measure (10) forcibly contacts the bottom edge of the mounting plate (43a), thereby securely mounting the tape measure (10) in the tool holder (40).

5 Advantageously, the exemplary tool holder (40) enables a person to mount a tool (e.g., tape measure) without having to look at the tool holder (40) as the tool is mounted. Indeed, once contact is made between the guide plate (41) and the tool's spring clip, all the person has
10 to do is maintain sufficient contact between the spring clip the guide plate (41) while sliding the tool down towards the mounting portion (43) and the sidewalls (42) will guide the spring clip to the mounting portion (43) as needed.

15 It is to be understood that Figs. 2-6 are schematic diagrams of exemplary tool holders according to the invention, which are not necessarily drawn to scale. It is to be appreciated, however, that optimal sizes and shapes of various components of a tool holder according to the
20 invention can be selected based on, e.g., the type of tool and associated spring clip.

By way of example, optimal dimensions and configuration of components of a tool holder according to an exemplary embodiment of the invention, which is adapted

for a conventional tape measure as depicted in Figs. 1a and 1b, will now be discussed. It is to be understood, however, that nothing herein shall be construed as placing any limitation on the scope of the invention.

5 For instance, as shown in Fig. 5, a distance d_3 , which represents the distance from the front surface (S) of the guide plate (41) to the outer edge of the sidewalls (42), as well as the distance between the front surface (S) of the guide plate (41) and the inner surface of the mounting
10 plate (43a), can be selected based on a distance d_1 between the end portion (32) of the spring clip tongue (31) and the tape measure casing (20), as shown in Fig. 1a. More specifically, in one exemplary embodiment, the distance d_3 is approximately equal to or slightly smaller than the
15 distance d_1 . Indeed, the width d_3 is selected such that the bottom portion of the tape measure (10) does not make contact to the mounting portion (43) as the tape measure is slideably engaged into position. Typically, with conventional tape measures, the distance d_1 between the end
20 portion (32) and the casing (20) is about 3/16 of an inch. Thus, the width d_3 of the sidewalls and mounting portion is preferably about 3/16 of an inch, although it is to be understood that the width d_3 may vary depending on the parameters of the tape measure used.

In addition, in one exemplary embodiment, the width W of the mounting portion (43) (as shown in Fig. 2) is preferably selected to be slightly greater than the width d_2 of the spring clip (30) (as shown in Fig. 1b) so that the tape measure is tightly secured. Typically, with conventional tape measures, the width d_2 of the spring clip is about 1.25 inches, although it is to be understood that the width d_2 may vary depending on the parameters of the tape measure used. In such embodiment, the width W is about 1.75 inches.

Furthermore, in one exemplary embodiment, the size and shape of the aperture (45) can be optimized for a given spring clip configuration, to enable smooth sliding engagement/disengagement of the spring clip to/from the mounting portion (43). In particular, in one exemplary embodiment as depicted in Fig. 2, the aperture (45) is defined by a bottom curved edge (41c) of the guide plate. As noted above, as the spring clip (30) slideably engages the mounting plate (43a), the tongue portion (31) starts to deflect away from its point of contact with the casing (20) due to the mounting plate (43a) being inserted between the tongue (31) and casing (20). The aperture (45) enables the end portion (32) to protrude therefrom, thereby preventing the engagement process from being impeded due to, e.g., the

end portion (32) being pressed against the surface (S) of the guide plate (41) as the spring clip starts to deflect.

Furthermore, although the aperture (45) of the exemplary tool holder (40) is depicted as being defined by the curved edge (41c), it is to be understood that the aperture (45) can be any suitable shape such as rectangular.

It is to be appreciated that a tool holder according to the invention (such as the exemplary tool holder (40) discussed above) may be made of any rigid material such as stainless steel, aluminum or plastic, or any other rigid material that is durable and provides a low friction surface to slideably contact the spring clip of a tool.

Furthermore, various methods may be used for constructing a tool holder according to the invention, depending on the material used. For example, in the exemplary tool holder (40) described above, the guide plate (41) and sidewalls (42) can be integrally formed with stainless steel or aluminum for example, whereby the sidewalls (42) are formed by bending the tapered edges of a rigid plate, or whereby the sidewalls (42) are welded or otherwise connected to the tapered side edges (41a) of the guide plate (41). In addition, if plastic is used, the tape measure holder (40) can be formed by injection

molding, for example. One of ordinary skill in the art can readily envision other methods for building a tape measure holder according to the invention.

Further, a tool holder according to the invention may
5 comprise any suitable mechanism for securing the tool holder to a person's belt, pocket or other garment. For instance, the exemplary tool holder (40) described above includes a spring clip (44) mounted on the back thereof to attach to a person's belt or pocket. It is to be
10 understood, however, that a tool holder according to the invention may comprise any suitable attachment mechanism, such as slots form on a back surface thereof, for insertably receiving a belt. In addition, a tool holder according to the invention may be mounted directly on a
15 leather tool belt, for instance.

It is to be appreciated that a tool holder according to the invention may be designed and fabricated to hold not only tape measures, but other tools having a similar configuration with a flexible spring clips attached thereto
20 such as snap lines, etc.

It is to be further appreciated that from the standpoint of a manufacturer, a tool holder according to the invention is relatively easy and inexpensive to

manufacture and is cost effective from the standpoint of the user.

Although illustrative embodiments have been described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is
5 to be understood that the present invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be affected therein by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. All such changes and
10 modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.